

The Value of Public Relations:
Measuring the Success of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube in
Corporate Companies

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Abstract

This paper is a combination of research and data from three experts who were interviewed about the value of social in a corporate company, specifically Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Social media's presence has increased at an exponential pace in the past five years, and consumers are constantly looking to access new information. It has become a useful tool for both internal and external communication within a company. As research shows, "[companies] are revamping and modernizing their print publications, starting radio and video shows, using social media to foster two-way communication, using the new multimedia tools to reach new audiences, telling better stories, improving how their executives communicate — in short, they're doing the creative work they wanted to do before it was beaten out of them by the system," (Crescenzo, p. 10). While it has become a popular communication tool, it is important to do research to prove how effective and vital it is to a company's success.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The paper highlights the importance of corporations' public relations branches and their use of social media, specifically YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. With society's constant demand of instant information, a corporation's "Some industry gurus claim that if you do not participate in Facebook and YouTube, you are not part of cyberspace anymore. Social media allow firms to engage in timely and direct end-consumer contact at relatively low cost and higher levels of efficiency than can be achieved with more traditional communication tools," (Kaplan, 2012).

Sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter can help a company quickly convey a specific message to its consumers before a situation gets out of control. By using social media, corporations can manage communication about a certain situation.

Background of the Problem

Social media did not gain much traction until around 2007. Social media sites began to emerge, and people began to take more interest as each year progressed. Facebook was launched in 2004, YouTube was launched in 2005, and Twitter was launched in 2006, according to each company's site. Yet, at the time these companies released their services, corporations were not focused on these sites' value.

“We’ve always valued word of mouth; social media puts it on digital steroids by allowing you to search for it. Social media eliminates multiple individual redundancies in society. This is a tremendous benefit in saving people’s time, energy, and frustration. It is mission critical for companies to understand that the impact of social media shifts traditional business practices across marketing, recruiting, manufacturing, etc. Products and services will find us in the near future,” (Qualman, 2011). Since social media holds such a strong presence in today’s society, it is strongly recommended that corporate companies have a voice in these channels to stay connected with their publics.

Purpose of the Study

By collecting all of the relevant information about the connection between a corporate company’s use of social media and its successes, it can be recommended that a company begin to use certain outlets that pertain to their product or service. If a company can control their statements to the public in a timely manner, they are able to maintain their desired image while staying connected within the cyber community. Researching and presenting results on the benefits of corporate social media use will encourage future companies to adopt the practice as well.

How This Study Will Be Conducted

This study is a senior project that will take place at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Three interviews will have taken place with professionals in the workforce and experts on the importance of social media. They

will be asked a variety of questions in order to further my understanding of the subject.

Research Questions

The following questions were carefully chosen so that this study focused solely on corporate companies' use of social media sites like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.

1. Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?
2. Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?
3. How specifically do Facebook, YouTube and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?
4. In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?
5. Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?
6. Does the social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

Definitions of Related Terms

The terms below will be mentioned throughout the study and are here for the reader to reference back to if needed.

Social Media: “Social media, the term commonly referring to blogs and social network sites online, have been heralded as ushering in a change allowing worldwide, networked communication instantaneous. Such media describe the online practices that utilize technology and enable people to share content, opinions, experiences, insights, and media themselves,” (Lariscy, 314.)

ROI (Return on Investment): “A measurement of the amount of money that is realized as a result of a certain investment of resources. The amount earned in proportion to the capital invested, usually as a percentage,” (Tuttle, 201).

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility): “Corporate social responsibility means that a corporation should be held accountable for any of its actions that affect people, their communities, and their environment. It implies that negative business impacts on people and society should be acknowledged and corrected if at all possible,” Karake-Shalhoub, 22).

Outline of the Study

Chapter One is a background of the study, the purpose of the study, an overview of the study, and definitions of abstract terms. Chapter two is the literature review, where the focus will be the research on the questions being asked. Chapter three is the overall methodology of the study. Chapter four will discuss the interviews that took place and will highlight the important data that deserves mentioning. Finally, chapter five will summarize and conclude the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

After further reviewing the literature, social media has been defined as forms of electronic communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.

Defining Social Media and Corporate Social Responsibility

There are numerous social media outlets, but to define the purpose of social media in general would be saying that it is a form of broad communication that helps people and organizations relay a message to their publics. According to Howard and Parks (2012), the definition of social media consists of three parts: “Social media consists of (a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, that becomes cultural products; and (c) the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content.” (p. 359).

Hoffmann (2011) discusses social media’s influence by saying, “social media is information content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. Social media is often referred to as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM). It is a fusion of social network effects and technology, transforming monologue (one to many) into dialogue (many to many). To many, it represents the democratization of information,” (p. 26).

This paper narrows down the search of social media's purpose in a corporate company. Every corporate company has a corporate social responsibility to its publics, and it is the company's public relations branch's responsibility to uphold those responsibilities. Corporate social responsibility can be defined in a variety of ways, with some saying it is a subset of ethics in every company, and others saying it is tailored to each business. According to Management Today Magazine (2009), "the point of corporate social media is to inspire loyalty to your brand," (p. 15.) What helps connect the company and its consumers to build this loyalty is social media.

The social media outlets that are focused on in this paper are Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Facebook just passed its one billionth user mark, Twitter passed its 500 million user mark, and YouTube has "hundreds of millions of users who upload a total of 48 hours of video per day," according to each company's website. "Twitter is the most popular social platform for corporations, but YouTube has seen the highest growth among Fortune Global 100 companies in the past year," PR Week US (2012) noted from the Global Social Media Check-Up study from Burson-Marsteller and Visible Technologies. "That said, no company can afford not to embrace social media and it is particularly useful for engaging customers. They can provide us real-time information, feedback on what they are happy or unhappy with, and that gives you the opportunity to respond, correct and retain," adds Goh of The Business Times Singapore. "Social media has changed the way that organizations engage their stakeholders. It is an imperative and essential platform, and those who ignore it do so at their own peril. Being constantly connected to

stakeholders through social media means that organizations must be ready to connect with them on a personal level by actively participating in their lives.”

With hundreds of millions of smartphone users today, people have the ability to access social media outlets within seconds. They share how they are feeling about a certain corporation’s product or service, and many people are influenced by these opinions. Social media plays a vital role in vigorously participating in these conversations with consumers.

The Importance of Social Media with a Company’s External Publics

Social media has become a relevant way for a company to connect with its consumers over the past five years. It has been both a blessing and a curse, in some senses, for it has connected people in ways like never before, but it also has raised people’s expectations when it comes to obtaining information. People will constantly be talking about a certain corporation and its products or services, and these corporations now need to join in on these conversations. According to Bruell (2011), “the traditional PR approach is to issue a statement, apologize and cross your fingers that it goes away. With social media, you need to reach out to who is talking and swaying opinions,” (p. 12). “Brand crises are as old as marketing itself and practitioners have long used tools to manage them. But the immediacy and contagion of social media has changed the game,” Bruell adds. “Today, there’s a tougher challenge than ever to pinpoint when the crisis hits a flash point and when it’s time to craft a response strategy without doing more harm than good.”

The New Zealand Herald adds to this by noting what the CEO of Dell has said in the past – “these social networking conversations are going to occur whether you like it or not. Do you want to be part of that or not?” Michael Dell has said. ‘My argument is you absolutely do. You can learn from them. You can improve your reaction time. And you can be a better company by listening and being involved in that conversation.’”

An essential task of a corporate PR employee is to manage what people are saying online regarding the corporate reputation. Often times, social media is a favored option for dealing with a crisis because it is often free. Aside from paid or promoted posts, it takes little effort to post something to a corporation’s account. Creamer of Advertising Age (2010) had a conversation with Brian Wallace of Blackberry’s In Motion, who stressed the value of social media and the return on investment. When asked by a colleague why Twitter was being used in the first place, Wallace said, “my response was that this post reached over 150,000 people, 98% of the posts were positive, most tweets made a positive association with our brand, and it drove a 15% increase in our followers. Now what's the value of all that to our company? For the cost of \$0.00 we have increased positive brand sentiment, generated a measurable earned-media value and now have 20,000+ more people who I can share product-related information to. Not a bad ROI [return on investment],” (p. 3). When a company wants to release a statement quickly, they turn to their social media outlets for a prompt response.

Hoffman (2011) discusses the how imperative it is for the message that a company is sending out to be accurate. “While the reach of a single Web 2.0 channel

usually falls far short of that of a TV channel, it can be argued that a specific target group can easily be addressed through a dedicated Twitter or YouTube channel. Given the low distribution costs of the long tail, it really isn't necessary to reach and mobilize a mass audience; the accuracy and appropriateness of the message become much more important," (p. 26). Here, Hoffman says that the message must be tailored in a truthful and appropriate way so that the followers who are paying attention to the post respond positively. Since the cost of the posts is virtually nothing, the company does not need to focus on reaching as many people as possible (as they would for a TV commercial slot).

The Importance of Social Media within a Company

While many people are focused on how a corporation uses social media to parallel the interests of its public, the value of social media within the corporation itself is often overlooked. Communication within a company is vital to the company's success, and social media is a way to connect employees. Tourish (1997) points out that internal communication directly correlates to a company's success. "Poole and Jenkins (1996) point out that firms with equivalent technology vary greatly in the quality of their communication systems and processes based on their levels of competitiveness. This suggests that corporate communication issues are frequently the decisive factor in determining business success. It has been further argued (Tourish, 1997) that managerial effectiveness is particularly correlated with an organization's ability to develop and sustain a coherent strategy for quality internal communication."

Social media is a way for people within a company to connect with colleagues, join in on conversations regarding the company, and get real-time information about a certain event or issue.

Maintaining Corporate Image and Expressing the Goals of the Company

Social media has become vital to the success of a corporation and it is crucial that corporate public relations teams utilize it completely. PR is the liaison between a company and the media, and, in today's world, the media needs instant access to information regarding a corporation's issue. York of Advertising Age (2009) mentions what Coca Cola digital communications director Adam Brown once said about corporate social media: "in contrast, the soda companies have corporate social-media-led departments and initiatives, often coming out of the corporate-communications world. Social media goes back to the basics of what public relations and communications are." Brown notes that social media is a way to get a certain message out to the masses, and this is how corporate companies can maintain their desired image. They post about things they support, deny, like, promote, etc. When an issue arises, a corporation can quickly send a message to the masses with just a few characters on the keyboard. It is quicker than issuing a press release and contacting the media for a press conference. It is virtually free and can clear something up before the rumors begin.

As Hoffman (2011) says, "social media are more than a fad. They are also more than just an accumulation of additional communication channels. Social media influence the way people communicate, interact and collaborate. They lead to a new

communication culture that brings new challenges for corporate communication and reputation management. PR professionals are faced with the task of developing new solutions, tailor-made to their company's situation as well as to the needs and wishes of their core target groups. The sooner companies find a fitting response, decide on necessary adaptations and embark on promising experiments, the higher their chances of fostering and maintaining a positive reputation in this new environment," (p. 26).

Crescenzo (2009) discusses how these corporations are working constantly to keep the communication relevant to the conversations. "They are revamping and modernizing their print publications, starting radio and video shows, using social media to foster two-way communication, using the new multimedia tools to reach new audiences, telling better stories, improving how their executives communicate — in short, they're doing the creative work they wanted to do before it was beaten out of them by the system," (p. 10).

Social media has become popular among many large companies around the world, and it has become essential to many companies today. Marjo (2011) talks about how large companies are firing on all cylinders with social media these days, saying, "Businesses initially saw social media as another way to market goods and services to customers. Now it's gaining traction within companies as an effective way to reach workers, and to connect workers with each other. In a survey conducted this year for the San Francisco-based International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation, almost 70 percent of companies said they use social media for internal communication - up from 45 percent in a

similar survey last year.” Corporate companies are now taking advantage of everything that social media has to offer.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter is meant to outline the methods of data collection. Included are the list of participants, the interview questions, and the presented data.

Participants

The participants of this study were carefully chosen for their expertise, either as an employee of a corporation or someone who works in the public relations field. It was important to get both a corporate and non-corporate opinion on the value of public relations in order to find a balance. Each participant was given the same six questions, which focused on the value of public relations' use of social media in a corporate company.

The public relations practitioner was Mary Verdin of Verdin Marketing group based in San Luis Obispo, California. The corporate perspective comes from Chip Visci, the Director of Communications at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. The corporate public relations perspective comes from Lauren Svensson, a senior publicist at Electronic Arts, based in Redwood Shores, California.

Interview Questions

The following questions were given to each participant in order to collect relevant data for this study.

1. Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?

2. Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?
3. How specifically do Facebook, YouTube and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?
4. In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?
5. Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?
6. Does the social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

Data Collection

The three interviews took place in fall of 2012 and were all conducted via email communication. The emails were later transcribed and can be referenced in the appendix of this study. Those being interviewed were told to give their honest opinions for each question in order to exemplify a truthful representation of this field.

Limitations

Time was the largest issue of this study, for it had to be conducted and presented within a ten-week period. California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo is on the quarter system, with each quarter consisting of ten weeks. More research and additional interviews could have been conducted if there were no time constraints involved. In order to get the most concise information with the allotted time, the participants of this study were chosen carefully as to accurately

express knowledge about the fields of corporate communications and public relations.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This chapter will transcribe the given answers from the various respondents to the survey, as well as parallel the research mentioned in chapter 2. Each question will be followed by the three different answers from the three different respondents.

Participants of the Study:

Public Relations Practitioner

The expert chosen for this particular field was Mary Verdin. Verdin owns Verdin Marketing, based in San Luis Obispo, California, which she started in 2003. With over 20 years of public relations and marketing experience, Verdin was an ideal candidate to be interviewed from a non-corporate public relations perspective. Verdin is an active member in the central coast community and frequently visits California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo to share her company's story.

Corporate Communications

The expert chosen for this particular field was Chip Visci, the Director of Communications for the Cal Poly Corporation as well as a member of the Governing Board of Directors for Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center. Visci also has previous experience with the San Jose Mercury News and the San Luis Obispo Tribune. With

more than 30 years of experience in the field of communications, Visci has seen the development of social media over the past few years first-hand.

Corporate PR Practitioner

The expert chosen to represent both a corporate perspective as well as a public relations perspective is Lauren Svensson, a senior publicist at Electronic Arts. Svensson has had experience both at a boutique public relations firm and a corporate company. She currently works in the social and mobile division of Electronic Arts, which is the fastest growing division of gaming currently. To date, she has overseen campaigns for more than fifty titles across multiple platforms, and has watched public relations develop alongside the social media boom the past few years.

Corporate Public Relations and Social Media Questions and Answers

Each participant was asked these same six questions regarding corporate public relations and social media. Each question lists the three separate responses.

1. Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?

- Chip Visci: "A company's success is contingent on many aspects; chiefly, though, a company has to produce quality products. No amount of skillful PR can overcome poor product quality. Social media is only one tool in

the PR toolkit, and thus only one aspect of many that contribute to a company's success." (Appendix A).

- Lauren Svensson: "At EA, we have robust PR teams and social media management teams that work together to leverage social media channels like Facebook and Twitter to acquire new users and engage our existing users. At a video game company like EA, it's particularly important for us to drive social media programs because we tend to find that our most engaged users are typically more prone to a) continue playing the EA games they've already purchased (rather than downloading a game, playing it once and then not picking it up again) and b) purchase new EA games in the future. One of the goals of our social media programs is to create a feeling of community among our players so they feel more invested in the game that they're playing and more invested in EA as a whole. We believe that over time, this leads to brand loyalty among our fans." (Appendix B).
- Mary Verdin: "Everyone talks about ROI these days, and it is hard to measure social media, except over a period of time as trends. I saw a great quote from a guy name Erik Qualman that is something like this: 'The ROI of social media is that your business will be around in five years.' That said, I think that, in today's world, businesses do need to start a conversation with their customers and engage with them. One-way communication through traditional advertising isn't trusted so much anymore...word of mouth and authentic brands are." (Appendix C).

2. Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?

- Chip Visci: "There is no question that competent marketing can give a company an edge. Again, though, social media is but one aspect of public relations, and public relations is but one aspect of marketing." (Appendix A).
- Lauren Svensson: "If the other competitors aren't providing an engagement channel for their users, then yes. I know I should be speaking to EA here, but one of the "best practice" examples of social media in the gaming industry is, in my opinion, Capcom. Capcom uses Facebook, Twitter, and its own community site called Capcom-unity to engage with its fans. Capcom really shines over its competitors in a lot of ways with its social media usage because they have such an investment in their fans and they've found a way to effectively use social media to create a really deep relationship with their community. In addition to lots of game-specific forums on the Capcom-Unity site, for example, Capcom also manages an "Ask Capcom" forum where fans can submit questions and Capcom employees can post answers. I'm assuming their PR team must be pretty involved with this as they wouldn't want any of their community managers leaking confidential/unannounced info (e.g., if a fan were to ask about a release date for an upcoming game and a Capcom community manager were to respond with a date that hadn't been publically communicated yet by the PR team, that could pose an issue),

but overall it's a wonderful way for the fans to feel engaged with the company, and I've noticed that Capcom community members, in particular, tend to be among the fanatical in the gaming industry because of this." (Appendix B).

- Mary Verdin: "Social media is an opportunity to get the personality of a brand out to consumers and potential customers. That is what can set the company apart. What core values does the company have, and how can that be communicated to customers to build loyalty? Look at what Tom's Shoes has done!" (Appendix C).

3. How specifically do Facebook, YouTube and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?

- Chip Visci: "The above questions are about social media, and Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are social media platforms. To the degree a PR strategist can use these to effectively tell a company's story, more power to that PR strategist. Social media are channels of communication. But like all channels of communication, the key is the quality of the content. GINGO is a law of communications. Garbage In, Garbage Out."
- Mary Verdin: "The more ways to tell a story, the better. The more channels you can use to get the story out, the more people will see it. Using photos, videos and microblogging about a company is a great thing. Of course, many companies are afraid of the comments that come back...they can't necessarily control what people write (unless it's defamatory, a legal issue or contains profanity, in which case it should be

deleted or hidden...). But that's also an opportunity. If a company has 10 positive comments and one or two negative ones, that actually gives credibility to the positive because it shows things aren't filtered and they are real. And, if someone says something negative, they are already out there saying it, but this gives the company the ability to comment back. The response is as much for the other people who will see how the negative comment was handled as it is for the person who complained.” (Appendix C).

4. In today’s fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?

- Chip Visci: “I can argue that it is not important at all, and I can argue that social media are vitally important. It all depends how one defines ‘general public’ and ‘significant.’ Is it important to the general public to know within minutes that Israel and Hamas signed a cease-fire agreement? I would say that if you define ‘general public’ as your typical citizen living in San Luis Obispo County, the general public doesn’t need to know within minutes. But if you are living in Tel Aviv or Gaza, it might be very valuable to know that within minutes. And social media could be the channel that gets you that news right away. If you run a specialty tool company in Los Angeles that manufactures diamond-tipped drills for precision glass cutting (I am making this up), and the source of your diamonds is South Africa, and for some reason the South African government decides that it will no longer allow exports of its diamonds to

the United States, you might want to know that right away so you can quickly line up some other source of diamonds and be first in line rather than 35th in line. But to the general public, which isn't going to buy a diamond today, tomorrow or even two months from now, it's not vital to know that the minute it's announced." (Appendix A).

- Lauren Svensson: "We believe it's very significant; so many of our fans consume media via social channels that it's not only becoming a huge opportunity for us to interface directly with them via the channels we own (e.g, EA Mobile Facebook pages and Twitter feeds), but it's also becoming one of the primary ways they get their news (more so than the traditional media we're used to working with), so this affects how we conduct public relations as well. Increasingly, we work with both traditional media and their own social channels to push out news about our products. For example, once in a while we'll pitch for coverage placement not only on our partner's core web site/blog/magazine, but also pitch for some kind of inclusion on their social media channels, be it a giveaway of some sort or a simple post that echoes the mention of our product from their original coverage." (Appendix B).
- Mary Verdin: "It changes every day. As our population gets older, it will only become more relevant. Even my nine-year-old won't buy anything online (with his allowance!) without checking reviews." (Appendix C).

5. Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?

- Chip Visci: “It all depends on your strategy and objectives. What audience do you need to reach? How does that audience get its information? Not everybody uses or welcomes social media. I know some very tech savvy people, who are very wealthy, very politically engaged, and they refuse to sign up for Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. So, you could spend a lot of time (and time is money) on social media, but you will never reach those people who might be highly beneficial to your cause if you could reach them.” (Appendix A).
- Lauren Svensson: “It depends on the social media channel we’re targeting—overall, we do see value in social media programs, but as with any marketing initiative, there can be hits and misses, and sometimes ROI can be hard to measure. Two ways we definitely see ROI on our investment is when we’re engaging users via our own channels and doing partnerships with some of our larger media partners on their media channels. We also did a promotional Twitter placement recently with a celebrity that was interesting as well—while this particular celebrity had a ton of Twitter followers, we didn’t see a significant lift in downloads of the product he was promoting following his Tweet so it may have been a bad demographic fit for us. As with any marketing program, though, social media still requires some trial and error to see what’s effective and what’s not.” (Appendix B).
- Mary Verdin: “I think the best way to measure it is to track who's talking about your brand and categorize as negative or positive. You can then

watch how that changes based on strategies implemented or events that happen (good or bad). As always, having an ongoing PR program (preferably with social media) is going to position you better in the marketplace and make your recovery faster if there is any negative publicity or crises that occurs. Be proactive and be prepared!" (Appendix C).

6. Should social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

- Chip Visci: "Content is king. Content on social media should certainly support the company's main objectives. Content distributed on social media should be tailored to the medium, and certainly should echo and be consistent with the company's main objectives." (Appendix A).
- Lauren Svensson: "Absolutely. Three of the goals of our mobile and social division, in particular, are to acquire, engage, and monetize our users, and social media provides a funnel to do all three of those things. Social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube give us a platform to acquire new users, and once we've acquired them we try to engage with them in meaningful ways via those channels so they become more invested in our product and (ideally) monetize for us." (Appendix B).
- Mary Verdin: "Social media, PR, any marketing should absolutely support and further a company's business goals. That's part of branding...message, philosophy and resources should all go to further the company's brand and help it move forward and be successful as an integrated effort." (Appendix C).

Related Research

The following questions are similar to the interview questions and were included in order to connect the published literature regarding corporate companies' use of social media with the views of those interviewed.

1. How should social media be defined?

This question was examined to give social media a basic definition. It was necessary to not only define what social media is, but to discuss its purpose as well as its long-term benefits. Research proves that social media has become a revolutionary way to start conversations between a large company and its consumers. It is not only a way to promote external communication within a company, but internal communication between employees as well. It is a way for various departments in a corporation to stay connected on recent information regarding the company.

- a. "Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content," (Kaplan, Haenlein 62).
- b. "The current trend toward social media can therefore be seen as an evolution back to the Internet's roots, since it re-transforms the World Wide Web to what it was initially created for: a platform to facilitate information exchange between users," (Kaplan, Haenlein 59).

- c. "Social media, the term commonly referring to blogs and social network sites online, have been heralded as ushering in a change allowing worldwide, networked communication instantaneous. Such media describe the online practices that utilize technology and enable people to share content, opinions, experiences, insights, and media themselves," (Lariscy, 314.)
- d. "Your employees have Facebook and Twitter accounts. They watch videos on YouTube. They are already living in the social media universe. *That* is their reality. Your business needs a strategy for operating in that universe," (Barlow, Thomas 22).

2. How will social media platforms separate a company from its competitors?

This question was examined to see how a social media platform could be designed not only to promote a product or service for a corporate company, but to set that company apart from its competitors as well. Since social media has become a main focus of numerous corporate public relations teams, these companies need to decide how they are going to gain leverage on their competitors through social media.

Today's consumers expect a company's social media handles to disclose information to them about the most recent happenings in the company, while companies use their social media handles as a way to persuade consumers to utilize their product or service.

- a. “Our competitors have [a social media strategy] and if they don’t, they will have one very soon. Also, many of our current employees—and virtually *all* of our future employees—expect up to develop and support some sort of corporate social media platform.” (Barlow, Thomas 10).

3. What is the significance of social media within a corporate company?

This question was examined to determine the value of social media within a company. If there is no purpose for using social media, a company will most likely not waste its time investing time and even money. Social media has proven to be a way to reach the masses with just a click of a button. It helps to promote the ideals and goals of a company, all while starting the conversation about a specific topic before the public begins to distribute false information.

The amount of companies using social media rises daily.

- a. a. “Social media can also provide complete transparency into a company’s strategy, its progress toward meeting its goals, and its “thinking” about its products, services, markets, customers, and even broader issues like the environment and corporate social responsibility,” (Postman, 2009.)
- b. “Social media, done properly, is the closest thing yet to one-on-one conversation between the largest companies and the millions of people they do business with,” (Postman, 2009.)

4. In today's fast-paced world where people need instantaneous information, how significant is a social media source to the general public?

Since there has been a recent rise in social media and smartphones users, people use these tools to access information within moments. Not only do consumers have access to a company's information, but they are also able to update their own social media handles to voice their opinions as well.

The speed of information being transferred is also vital for a company to release a public statement about a specific issue as a way to control a crisis. Companies use social media as a way to deliver a short message about something affecting their company before any misleading statements can be made.

- a. "Social media lets communications happen at lightening fast speed.

The tools available today to update a blog, community, or website or to create and upload video, allow nontechnical communications people and others to create content and publish it on the web within a matter of minutes or moments. This has important implications with corporate communications, particularly in crisis communications and other 'breaking news' situations," (Postman, 2009.)

5. Are corporate companies utilizing social media as a main form of communication?

This question was examined to see if social media was actually a relevant form of communication in corporate companies. Since social media recently developed in roughly the past 5 years, it was uncertain whether or not companies were adapting to this new way of connecting with their consumers. However, research proves that social media is quickly catching on within Fortune 500 companies, with Twitter being the most prominent source of social media (Larson, Watson 2011). While those interviewed claimed it was not necessarily the main form of communication, it was quickly becoming a way to promote both internal and external communication within the company.

- a. "A 2010 study counted 23 percent of Fortune 500 companies with public-facing blogs, 60 percent with corporate Twitter accounts, and 56 percent with corporate profiles on Facebook," (Larson, Watson 2011).

6. Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for corporate companies who choose to use social media?

This question was examined to analyze how successful social media can really be. Most of the time, a corporate company will not invest in a marketing or public relations venture unless they are fully aware of its benefits in the long run. By proving that social media is advantageous to a company's success, a corporation is more likely to continue to use this method.

Social media is typically a zero-cost investment, since Tweeting, posting to Facebook, and uploading to YouTube are often free. Outlier cases to this statement include promoted posts, where the company pays for their posting to be seen by more people on purpose, and when they get a celebrity or public figure to post on their behalf. However, companies who invest in expensive social media practices often see higher returns on their product or service.

Hoffman and Fodor in 2010 cited a recent study, saying, “Vocalpoint, Procter & Gamble’s social networking site, has over 350,000 members who talk about P&G products; by linking these customer investments in brand conversation to sales, the site is credited with market response increases of up to 30%.” They also noted that, while the return on investment is important, the content of the social media must be effective in order for the ROI to have meaning. “Our premise is that social media efforts that are developed in the context of the 4 c’s — connections, creation, consumption and control — that underlie consumer motivations to participate will lead to higher ROI because the company’s marketing investments can better leverage the active ‘investments’ its customers will make as they engage with the company’s brands,” (Hoffman, Fodor 2010).

Corporate Social Media Data

The following is a result of analyzing the data as well as the literature when combined.

- 1. Is there a direct correlation between a company’s PR division using social media and the company’s success?**

All of those interviewed agreed that it was one factor that contributed to a company's overall success. Visci noted that while social media is an acceptable tool, he made sure to note that no amount of decent public relations practice can help a poor product or service. Svensson added that it created a sense of community in the vast corporate world. Verdin said that it was a way for a company to start necessary conversations with its consumers.

Table 1

Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?

Expert	Response
Chip Visci	It is one tool that contributes to a company's success
Lauren Svensson	Yes—it creates a sense of community with consumers
Mary Verdin	Businesses need it as a way to start conversations

The literature agrees with all of the above answers, saying, "That said, no company can afford not to embrace social media and it is particularly useful for engaging customers. They can provide us real-time information, feedback on what they are happy or unhappy with, and that gives you the opportunity to respond, correct and retain. Our NETS Facebook page enables us to have a conversation with our customers and to win them over again and again," (Goh 2012).

Social media has become a piece of the corporate public relations puzzle as a way to connect with the numerous consumers a company acquires.

2. Does a successful social media source driven by company's public relations team help set the company apart from its competitors?

A way to measure a part of the ROI (return on investment) of social media is to see that what a company is doing online is successfully setting them apart from their competitors. Good social media campaigns can go viral and gain the attention of thousands or even millions of people, which, in turn, would give that particular company a certain edge on its competitors.

Visci said that while good marketing can set a company apart from others, social media, again, is just a piece of a company being successful. Svensson notes that companies who truly engage with their consumers through social media channels tend to be more successful, since the consumers realize the investment being made in them. Verdin adds that social media is a good way for a company to let the “personality” of their brand to shine through, which is what sets the company apart from its competitors.

Table 2

Does successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company apart from its competitors?

Expert	Response
Chip Visci	Competent marketing can give a company an edge
Lauren Svensson	Yes, especially if the fans know effort is being invested
Mary Verdin	It is an opportunity to portray a brand's personality

The literature notes that the level of competitiveness coincides with how well they communicate with their publics, noting, "Poole and Jenkins (1996) point out that firms with equivalent technology vary greatly in the quality of their communication systems and processes based on their levels of competitiveness. This suggests that corporate communication issues are frequently the decisive factor in determining business success. It has been further argued (Tourish, 1997) that managerial effectiveness is particularly correlated with an organization's ability to develop and sustain a coherent strategy for quality internal communication," (Tourish 1997).

3. How specifically do Facebook, YouTube and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?

Since the number of social media outlets increase exponentially daily, it would be impossible to do research on every single one. That is why this paper focused on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, three major social media outlets that have been in the spotlight the last five years.

Visci once again noted that the quality of the social media content is key. If a company uses their social media outlets often but is not properly conveying their message, then it is virtually useless. Verdin added that the more ways a company can increase its outreach, the better, and these three channels can help with that. She said that it could be used once again as a way for a company to join in on the conversations about their company.

Table 3

How specifically do Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter help/hurt the above questions?

Expert	Response
Chip Visci	They can effectively tell a company's story
Lauren Svensson	No comment
Mary Verdin	The more channels a company can use, the better

The literature says that the presence of these specific outlets is obvious, with PR Newsweek saying, "Twitter is the most popular social platform for corporations, but YouTube has seen the highest growth among Fortune Global 100 companies in the past year, according the Global Social Media Check-Up study from Burson-Marsteller and Visible Technologies. More than eight in 10 Fortune Global 100 companies have at least one Twitter account, and 79% have a branded YouTube channel, up almost 40% from last year," (PR Newsweek, 2012). There are now over one billion Facebook users as well, which is a huge audience for many of these corporate companies hoping to reach the masses. "A 2010 study counted 23 percent of Fortune 500 companies with public- facing blogs, 60 percent with corporate Twitter accounts, and 56 percent with corporate profiles on Facebook," (Larson Watson, 2011). It is apparent that these three outlets are being used more and more by corporate companies.

4. In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?

It is no surprise that social media, along with the boom in smart phone users, has allowed people to access the information they need at a lightening-fast speed.

People are now connected with companies through their Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook handles, where pertinent information is released to the public. Today, people no longer need to wait for an official press release, but can visit a corporation's social media site for an official statement.

Visci points out that instant social media access is only significant if it pertains to a specific consumer. If an announcement or statement does not directly affect someone, Visci argues that it isn't necessary for him or her to get the information right away. Svensson, on the other hand, says it is very important when it comes to letting consumers interface with the company. Verdin notes that as time goes on, social media will only become more relevant.

Table 4

How significant is a social media source to the general public?

Expert	Response
Chip Visci	It is only relevant if it affects your audience directly
Lauren Svensson	It directly affects how EA conducts public relations
Mary Verdin	It is only becoming more relevant; changes daily

The literature says that while the immediacy of social media can be beneficial, it has become a challenge to choose when to release a statement and what crisis to focus on. "Brand crises are as old as marketing itself and practitioners have long used tools to manage them. But the immediacy and contagion of social media has changed the game. Today, there's a tougher challenge than ever to pinpoint when the crisis hits a flash point and when it's time to craft a response strategy without doing more harm than good," (Bruell, 2011). Regardless, it is obvious that social media has changed the pace at which consumers receive information from corporations.

5. Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for public relations in using social media?

In order for a company's executives to be convinced to make social media a priority, they must know that it is a guaranteed benefit to the company. Since social media is free more often than not, it is usually a high return, but it is very hard to tell at this point.

Visci makes a valid point in saying that engaging in social media takes time, and time is money, so it is vital to reach the right audiences and have good-quality content. Svensson says that the ROI is hard to measure, but that she often sees users engaging with their products through social media. She also says that social media, like any other marketing tool, requires trial and error to see just what ends up being successful. Verdin says that it is important to see who is talking about your brand and what they are saying, and then measure the return from there.

Table 5

Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?

Expert	Response
Chip Visci	Only if you know your audience; time is money
Lauren Svensson	Hard to measure; seen when users are engaged
Mary Verdin	Only if you track who is talking about your brand

The literature says that while there are no hard numbers at this point, it is apparent that social media is often successful. Brian Wallace, VP of Global Digital at Blackberry parent Research In Motion says, "I remember getting emails from my peers asking me why we would post such a thing and was this why we created our Twitter channel. My response was that this post reached over 150,000 people, 98% of the posts were positive, most tweets made a positive association with our brand, and it drove a 15% increase in our followers. Now what's the value of all that to our company? For the cost of \$0.00 we have increased positive brand sentiment, generated a measurable earned-media value and now have 20,000+ more people who I can share product-related information to. Not a bad ROI," (Creamer, 2010).

Many corporate companies are seeing positive results and do not feel like they have anything to lose since it is a low-cost investment.

6. Should social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

It was important to research how a company was controlling the content of their posts on their social media outlets. If a company wants to reach a certain audience or express a public message, what is the most effective way to do that?

Visci said that the content on a company's social media should support the company's objectives, and that both content and consistency are key. Svensson agrees, saying that social media helps acquire, engage, and monetize users. Verdin agreed as well, saying that social media, public relations, and marketing should all support a company's main goals.

Table 6

Should social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

Expert	Response
Chip Visci	Yes; content and consistency are key
Lauren Svensson	Absolutely; Acquire, engage, and monetize consumers
Mary Verdin	Yes; it is a part of the branding process

The literature agrees with the experts, noting, "social media can also provide complete transparency into a company's strategy, its progress toward meeting its goals, and its 'thinking' about its products, services, markets, customers, and even broader issues like the environment and corporate social responsibility," (Postman, 2009.)

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to further understand the value of corporate companies' public relations divisions utilizing social media. Although it is apparent that social media has become a prevalent tool for both large and small businesses alike, it is important to understand just how crucial it is for a company to use one or more handles. In order to gain information on this topic, both literature published on the subject was analyzed as well as experts from the field had to be interviewed.

To gain information firsthand on the value (or lack thereof) of social media in a corporate company, each expert was asked the same six questions related to the topic:

1. Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?
2. Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?
3. How specifically do Facebook, YouTube and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?
4. In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?
5. Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?
6. Does the social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

These questions were not altered depending on the subject, and each subject was encouraged to speak honestly based on their knowledge and experience of social media, communications, and public relations.

After completing this study, it is apparent that social media can be quite beneficial for a corporate company. It is a way for companies to engage consumers and join in on the conversations about their products or services before a crisis forms. Consumers appreciate being recognized, and, while corporations are often made up of thousands of people and there are billions on consumers in the world, social media is a way to bridge the gap in communication. It is highly recommended that a company focus on the content they are releasing to the public; if a company does not control the message, it will be more difficult to deal with a crisis later on.

It is highly recommended that companies engage in the conversations about their company via social media. Companies sometimes have teams that specifically focus on responding to social media commentary, whether they are tweets or posts. "These [social networking] conversations are going to occur whether you like it or not. Do you want to be part of that or not?" Michael Dell has said. "My argument is you absolutely do. You can learn from them. You can improve your reaction time. And you can be a better company by listening and being involved in that conversation," (The New Zealand Herald, 2010). Joining in on the conversation allows a company to get ahead of a crisis before it gets out of control.

Consistency is key when a company wants to portray a certain message or image. If a corporation is trying to target a certain audience, they must tailor their message to reach the most amounts of people possible, all while still being effective.

“While the reach of a single Web 2.0 channel usually falls far short of that of a TV channel, it can be argued that a specific target group can easily be addressed through a dedicated Twitter or YouTube channel. Given the low distribution costs of the long tail, it really isn't necessary to reach and mobilize a mass audience; the accuracy and appropriateness of the message become much more important,” (Hoffman, 26). The content of the message a company is sending out is just as important as the amount of people the message reaches.

Social media is also a helpful tool when it comes to internal communication. Since many employees today interact with one another through a variety of social media handles, it is wise for a corporation to connect with its employees through these handles. It aids companies with organization as well. “Businesses initially saw social media as another way to market goods and services to customers. Now it's gaining traction within companies as an effective way to reach workers, and to connect workers with each other,” (Johne, 2011). When a company's employees are united, it makes for a stronger work force.

It is importance to recognize the power of speed in today's virtual world. The combination of social media and the smartphone user increase means that people expect information immediately. When something happens within a corporate company, is it crucial to release a statement before the rumors begin. It has become simple to post, tweet, or comment on something, and it is recommended that corporations take advantage of this. “Social media lets communications happen at lightening fast speed. The tools available today to update a blog, community, or website or to create and upload video, allow nontechnical communications people

and others to create content and publish it on the web within a matter of minutes or moments. This has important implications with corporate communications, particularly in crisis communications and other 'breaking news' situations," (Postman, 2009.)

Conclusion

After extensive research on the topic of corporate public relations, it is evident that social media has become a successful public relations tool over the past five years, and will continue to grow and gain power in the corporate world.

The three experts interviewed voiced their honest opinions, and did not speak based on literature review. The interviews were necessary to gather relevant data to compare to the literature.

This study focuses on three major social media outlets—Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. If one wishes to obtain more information on a specific outlet, it is necessary to do further research.

This paper would be useful to those hoping to prove the value of the use of social media in a corporate company.

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Appendix A

Interview Transcript: Chip Visci

Chip Visci is the Director of Communications at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and is also on the Board of Directors at the Sierra Vista Regional Medical Center in San Luis Obispo, California. The interview took place through email on November 23, 2012.

Justine Gananian: Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?

Chip Visci: A company's success is contingent on many aspects; chiefly, though, a company has to produce quality products. No amount of skillful PR can overcome poor product quality. Social media is only one tool in the PR toolkit, and thus only one aspect of many that contribute to a company's success.

JG: Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?

CV: There is no question that competent marketing can give a company an edge. Again, though, social media is but one aspect of public relations, and public relations is but one aspect of marketing.

JG: How specifically do Facebook, YouTube and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?

CV: I'm not sure I understand your question. The above questions are about social media, and FB, YT and Twitter are social media platforms. To the degree a PR strategist can use these to effectively tell a company's story, more power to that PR strategist. Social media are channels of communication. But like all channels of communication, the key is the quality of the content. GINGO is a law of communications. Garbage In, Garbage Out.

JG: In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?

CV: I can argue that it is not important at all, and I can argue that social media are vitally important. It all depends how one defines "general public" and "significant." Is it important to the general public to know within minutes that Israel and Hamas signed a cease-fire agreement? I would say that if you define "general public" as your typical citizen living in San Luis Obispo County, the general public doesn't need to know within minutes. But if you are living in Tel Aviv or Gaza, it might be very valuable to know that within minutes. And social media could be the channel that gets you that news right away. If you run a specialty tool company in Los Angeles that manufactures diamond-tipped drills for precision glass cutting (I am making

this up), and the source of your diamonds is South Africa, and for some reason the South African government decides that it will no longer allow exports of its diamonds to the United States, you might want to know that right away so you can quickly line up some other source of diamonds and be first in line rather than 35th in line. But to the general public, which isn't going to buy a diamond today, tomorrow or even two months from now, it's not vital to know that the minute it's announced.

JG: Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?

CV: It all depends on your strategy and objectives. What audience do you need to reach? How does that audience get its information? Not everybody uses or welcomes social media. I know some very tech savvy people, who are very wealthy, very politically engaged, and they refuse to sign up for Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. So, you could spend a lot of time (and time is money) on social media, but you will never reach those people who might be highly beneficial to your cause if you could reach them.

JG: Does the social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

CV: Content is king. Content on social media should certainly support the company's main objectives. Content distributed on social media should be tailored to the medium, and certainly should echo and be consistent with the company's main objectives.

Appendix B

Interview Transcript: Lauren Svensson

Lauren Svensson started working at Electronic Arts, Inc. in public relations and is now a senior publicist. With experience at both boutique public relations firms and corporate public relations, Svensson can speak with knowledge about the use of social media. This interview took place through email on November 14, 2012.

Justine Gananian: Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?

Lauren Svensson: At EA, we have robust PR teams and social media management teams that work together to leverage social media channels like Facebook and Twitter to acquire new users and engage our existing users. At a video game company like EA, it's particularly important for us to drive social media programs because we tend to find that our most engaged users are typically more prone to a) continue playing the EA games they've already purchased (rather than downloading a game, playing it once and then not picking it up again) and b) purchase new EA games in the future. One of the goals of our social media programs is to create a feeling of community among our players so they feel more invested in the game that they're playing and more invested in EA as a whole. We believe that over time, this leads to brand loyalty among our fans.

JG: Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?

LS: If the other competitors aren't providing an engagement channel for their users, then yes. I know I should be speaking to EA here, but one of the "best practice" examples of social media in the gaming industry is, in my opinion, Capcom. Capcom uses Facebook, Twitter, and its own community site called Capcom-unity to engage with its fans. Capcom really shines over its competitors in a lot of ways with its social media usage because they have such an investment in their fans and they've found a way to effectively use social media to create a really deep relationship with their community. In addition to lots of game-specific forums on the Capcom-Unity site, for example, Capcom also manages an "Ask Capcom" forum where fans can submit questions and Capcom employees can post answers. I'm assuming their PR team must be pretty involved with this as they wouldn't want any of their community managers leaking confidential/unannounced info (e.g., if a fan were to ask about a release date for an upcoming game and a Capcom community manager were to respond with a date that hadn't been publically communicated yet by the PR team, that could pose an issue), but overall it's a wonderful way for the fans to feel

engaged with the company, and I've noticed that Capcom community members, in particular, tend to be among the fanatical in the gaming industry because of this.

JG: How specifically do Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?

LS: I might not be quite qualified enough to answer this one, but if you'd like I can have our social media manager, Tiffany, provide her expertise here.

JG: In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?

LS: We believe it's very significant; so many of our fans consume media via social channels that it's not only becoming a huge opportunity for us to interface directly with them via the channels we own (e.g, EA Mobile Facebook pages and Twitter feeds), but it's also becoming one of the primary ways they get their news (more so than the traditional media we're used to working with), so this affects how we conduct public relations as well. Increasingly, we work with both traditional media and their own social channels to push out news about our products. For example, once in a while we'll pitch for coverage placement not only on our partner's core web site/blog/magazine, but also pitch for some kind of inclusion on their social media channels, be it a giveaway of some sort or a simple post that echoes the mention of our product from their original coverage.

JG: Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?

LS: It depends on the social media channel we're targeting—overall, we do see value in social media programs, but as with any marketing initiative, there can be hits and misses, and sometimes ROI can be hard to measure. Two ways we definitely see ROI on our investment is when we're engaging users via our own channels and doing partnerships with some of our larger media partners on their media channels (for example, a giveaway on IGN.com's Facebook page or Twitter feed). We also did a promotional Twitter placement recently with a celebrity that was interesting as well—while this particular celebrity had a ton of Twitter followers, we didn't see a significant lift in downloads of the product he was promoting following his Tweet so it may have been a bad demographic fit for us. As with any any marketing program, though, social media still requires some trial and error to see what's effective and what's not.

JG: Does the social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

LS: Absolutely. Three of the goals of our mobile and social division, in particular, are to acquire, engage, and monetize our users, and social media provides a funnel to do all three of those things. Social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube give us a platform to acquire new users, and once we've acquired them we try to engage with them in meaningful ways via those channels so they become more invested in our product and (ideally) monetize for us.

Appendix C

Interview Transcript: Mary Verdin

Mary Verdin is the owner of her own marketing firm, Verdin marketing. She has over 20 years of marketing and public relations experience, and it was important to interview someone from a non-corporate public relations perspective. This interview took place through email on November 7, 2012.

Justine Gananian: Is there a direct correlation between a company's PR division using social media and the company's success?

Mary Verdin: Everyone talks about ROI these days, and it is hard to measure social media, except over a period of time as trends. I saw a great quote from a guy name Erik Qualman that is something like this: The ROI of social media is that your business will be around in five years. FYI that he'd be a good reference for you if you do some online research...this quote is actually in a GREAT video he produced and updates annually about the power and reach of social media. It's called the Social Media revolution. That said, I think that, in today's world, businesses do need to start a conversation with their customers and engage with them. One-way communication through traditional advertising isn't trusted so much anymore...word of mouth and authentic brands are.

JG: Does a successful social media source driven by a company's PR team help set the company in general apart from its competitors?

MV: Social media is an opportunity to get the personality of a brand out to consumers and potential customers. That is what can set the company apart. What core values does the company have, and how can that be communicated to customers to build loyalty? Look at what Tom's Shoes has done!

JG: How specifically do Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter help/hurt the above two questions?

MV: The more ways to tell a story, the better. The more channels you can use to get the story out, the more people will see it. Using photos, videos and microblogging about a company is a great thing. Of course, many companies are afraid of the comments that come back...they can't necessarily control what people write (unless it's defamatory, a legal issue or contains profanity, in which case it should be deleted or hidden...). But that's also an opportunity. If a company has 10 positive comments and one or two negative ones, that actually gives credibility to the positive because it shows things aren't filtered and they are real. And, if someone says something negative, they are already out there saying it, but this gives the company the ability

to comment back. The response is as much for the other people who will see how the negative comment was handled as it is for the person who complained.

JG: In today's fast-paced world where people need information right away, how significant is a social media source to the general public?

MV: It changes every day. As our population gets older, it will only become more relevant. Even my nine-year-old won't buy anything online (with his allowance!) without checking reviews.

JG: Is there a significant return on investment (ROI) for PR in using social media?

MV: I think the best way to measure it is to track who's talking about your brand and categorize as negative or positive. You can then watch how that changes based on strategies implemented or events that happen (good or bad). As always, having an ongoing PR program (preferably with social media) is going to position you better in the marketplace and make your recovery faster if there is any negative publicity or crises that occurs. Be proactive and be prepared!

JG: Does the social media content parallel the company's main objectives?

MV: Social media, PR, any marketing should absolutely support and further a company's business goals. That's part of branding...message, philosophy and resources should all go to further the company's brand and help it move forward and be successful as an integrated effort.